The value of style in architectural practice

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To date, organization theory's attempts to understand architecture firms have focused by and large on debates about increasing managerialization and economization of the profession. This paper suggests an alternative approach by conceptualizing architecture as practice that does not adhere only to a narrow economic logic of value creation but also focuses on the production of aesthetic value. We will introduce the concept of style to understand how architecture practice routinely breaks routines and follows the rule of rule breaking. We will analyze architecture practice as a form of organized heresy – a hegemonic engine for the production of difference. In order to illustrate our points we will draw on qualitative empirical fieldwork with an architecture firm (synonym Earth Architects).

Keywords: architecture; style; aesthetics; power; value

Introduction

Professionals have long been seen as the antithesis of bureaucracy (e.g., Abbott 1988). Traditionally, architecture has been analysed as a profession, as an institutional form infused with values of fee for service, independence and licence. However, some commentators see a convergence between the two forms occurring with respect to architecture. Pinnington and Morris (2002) argue that the architectural profession is being increasingly rationalized and managerialized. Following this logic, they sketch the development of architecture as a movement from a professional ethos towards a neo-liberal drive for control and economic success.

The objective of this paper is to argue that a trajectory from professionalism through rationalization is too general: our empirical research with Earth Architects (EA) did not substantiate the claim of increasing managerialization and rationalization in a significant case. Instead, we saw architecture not as undergoing colonization by notions of managerialism and economization so much as being an arena in which the production of aesthetic value inextricably links it to power struggles over legitimizing actions and claims. Managerialism is just one of several games played in the arena. Studying EA for several years, we were puzzled, first, by the loose narrative definitions for understanding of the profession that were current in EA. Second, we were surprised by the absence of managerialist concepts such as client service, economization, rationalization or clear accountability. EA's story did not follow the neat script of a dominant institutional logic of managerialism forcing individual organizations into mimicry. Rather, EA deployed strategies that seemed to constitute a different

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institutional logic as dominant in which the creation of uniquely representational aesthetic value was the most significant element.

In this paper, we will explore this line of theorizing further. We take the discourse of the changing nature of the profession as the point of departure of our argument. After briefly giving an account of our methodology we will recount the main findings of our empirical research. In our concluding section, we will discuss the implications of our arguments for theory and practice.

Theoretical background

The notion of the profession has a long history in architecture. Cuff (1991, 20) for instance argued 'the reasons why architects act and believe as they do are framed fundamentally by the architectural profession. The context set by the profession promotes and discourages certain ways of rationalizing practice's daily events.' Although one of the older established professions, recent studies tend, at best, to treat architecture either perfunctorily or not at all (see for instance the volumes edited by Brock, Powell, and Hinings 1999; Dent and Whitehead 2002). Several older contributions (Kostoff 1977; Pressman 1995; Saint 1983) remain valuable for their insights into architecture. It is generally accepted that the professionalization of architecture commenced in the 1850s (Gutman 1988; Levy 1980). Following a typical process of professionalization, architecture created a jurisdiction around a certain body of knowledge and then sought to monopolize its application (Abbott 1988; Johnson 1972). It was argued that architecture deserved the 'special status' of a profession because it had to address clients' needs and protect the public against insensitive buildings (Spector 2001).

Pinnington and Morris (2002) have studied the professional context in which architecture is embedded and the extent to which it is affected by the ongoing shift towards a more managerial self-understanding of the professions. Champy (2006) has diagnosed the pressure on architecture firms to achieve 'economization' of their field and adapt to managerial norms, including rationalization, efficiency and accountability, which stand in sharp contrast to the activities that traditionally characterize creative firms. Following this argument, it seems that the notion of a profession as an alternative organizational form, opposed to both market and hierarchy, is rapidly losing ground and being colonized by an agenda in which the profession is increasingly managed and positioned in markets.

Findings from studies into other professional fields, notably law and accounting, from the Alberta School (e.g., Cooper et al. 1996), suggest that the professions they have studied are rapidly transforming from partnership and professionalism as the key values (P2) to becoming managed professional businesses (MPBs). The new MPBs represent an institutional logic that promotes efficiency, rationalization, control and a customer service orientation.

It has been suggested that architecture as a profession has experienced significant change, including the adoption of business language as a dominant discourse, more formalized reporting and control mechanisms, and an increased emphasis on client service (Brock 2006; Pinnington and Morris 2002): in a word, *managerialism*. Pinnington and Morris (2002, 192) have described the P2 model as follows:

> Management efficiency and effectiveness is not the primary aim of the partnership; rather it aims to provide an internal environment conducive to professional practice and the development of professional knowledge. Across professional services firms, growing

consumer pressure, statutory reforms and a growing market-driven logic have changed the landscape: … professional firms have adopted more business-like modes of operating, and the pursuit of clients' material interests has been given primacy over professional concerns with public-good outcomes. (Pinnington and Morris 2002, 190; see also Cooper et al. 1996)

Theories of the changing nature of the profession have been informed by neo-institutionalism. Institutional analysis seeks to explain similarities in populations of organizations and thus tend towards large-scale determinism. Following this macro-perspective, individual architecture practices have little choice but to adopt to dominant institutional logics if these provide competitive advantage. For institutionalists, architectural organizations would be expected to be 'uneasy professionals' riven by inner conflicts (Williams, quoted in Spector 2001), torn between conformance to market pressure and an inner drive for creative expression. The conflict between being professionals who claim expert jurisdiction over an area of technical and codified knowledge, as opposed to being creative, innovative, *avant garde* and disruptive of codification and existing paradigms, has characterized architecture almost since its inception as a professional practice. Conformists and revolutionaries jostle side by side in the market. The contrast between the architect as a master builder, able to work with all the complex bureaucracy of planning that this entails, and the architect as a creative artist, conceiving and creating three-dimensional masterpieces of steel, glass and concrete in specific settings, sits at the heart of contemporary debates (Blau 1984, 6), leading to conflicts about whether design knowledge can be codified and represented in scientific form, or whether architecture is part of the arts (Fisher 2000). As Hill put it, 'the model of the architect as professional is reinforced by the law of the state, and the architect as artist is affirmed by the theory of autonomous art' (1999, 89).

The current debate that frames architecture as a profession leaves two main issues unresolved. First, architecture as an artistic endeavour does not fit into the neat logic of jurisdiction and closure that characterizes professions such as medicine, law or accounting. The *avant garde*, by definition, cannot be institutionalized – if it is it ceases to be ahead of the wave and can no longer be *avant garde*; hence, architecture conceived as an essentially innovative enterprise, one in the thrall to aesthetics, has to escape attempts to make its practice more managerial and predictable.

Second, while the discourse of the profession suggests a shift towards more managerial forms of professional work, this deterministic macro-view of social reality does not enable one to understand the subtleties and complexities of architectural practice. While it is undoubtedly the case that many architectural firms may well have gone down the managerial path, it is not the only one available nor is there any necessary determination that dictates that architectural firms must go this way. In contrast, the importance of the single case of EA is that it operates as a counterfactual to the deterministic argument from traditional institutional theory perspectives, which suggests that there is a plurality of possible logics in the field. Architectural practice may strive for the production of aesthetic value that translates into other 'orders of worth' (see Boltanski and Thévenot 1999) as a definite strategy: how does such aesthetic value production occur?

Methodology

EA was established in 1999 and grew rapidly. In 2009, the firm had two offices in two major cities with approximately 25 employees. EA was not only commercially successful but also highly acclaimed for its creative accomplishments. It won numerous

national architecture awards and was internationally regarded as one of Australia's top architecture firms. An indicator of its high reputation was frequent media coverage of its buildings in German, Australian, Scandinavian and UK design magazines. Also, EA represented its country at global architectural events such as the Venice Biennale of Architecture and the Rotterdam Architecture Biennale. Moreover, the practice also submitted entries to international competitions in which, more often than not, it was shortlisted.

Given this creative and commercial success, we were interested in how EA organized their practice. Starting with this rather broad question we began to appreciate that the production of aesthetic value was key to understanding its organization. We discussed our research interest with the three directors of the firm and negotiated access with them (as well as securing a moderate financial contribution that would cover travel costs and transcriptions of interviews). The firm's main interest was to obtain independent feedback from an organizational perspective that would act as a catalyst for internal reflection and discussion.

Following Cuff's (1991) methodological advice, we employed a qualitative approach (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Silverman 2005). Our fieldwork lasted for approximately 12 months from April 2006 until March 2007. The first author of the paper collected all data. Informal meetings and exchange of ideas have continued to date. As part of our data collection we conducted interviews with all employees, and these were recorded and transcribed (apart from one interview that was conducted over the phone and was not recorded). In addition to formal interviews, we had plenty of opportunities for informal conversations with organizational members. These were reproduced as accurately as possible in a database. In total, the records contain about 20 hours of recorded and transcribed interviews and more than 30 hours worth of audio-notes from unrecorded interviews. We also engaged in more observational and participatory forms of research, which included participation in site visits, design meetings, presentations, social events and several management meetings, including several full-day director's planning workshop and associate director's meetings. Finally, our data collection was complemented by an analysis of internal company documents, such as the 80-page office manual, working papers, publications and other relevant documents. Informed by our theoretical interests, we studied the data carefully and, as we moved between data and theory, we developed our narrative.

Findings

Architecture with a capital A

EA's self-understanding clearly marked them out as pursuing architecture 'with a capital A' (Adam) – meaning that they produce Architecture as a cultural form rather than as merely a contribution to the built environment. In fact, the capital A in Architecture was EA's *raison d'être*. One of EA's positioning documents explained the capital A approach to architecture as follows:

> EA emerged from a series of conversations in regard to the potential for architecture to open up question of cultural consequence in relation to our contemporary condition. The practice explores how architecture mediates what were traditional cultural relationships between people and between people and their world in a globalized condition where the very idea of cultural boundaries has been fundamentally questioned because of the inter-activity of society and capital at a global level. It is the view of EA that in this intercon-nected global circumstance architecture cannot rely on a fixed and singular cultural

condition but needs to engage with complex interconnected and overlapping systems. An effective role architecture can play in this context is to ask questions of those relationships and to make propositions about those relations specific to the multiple contexts gathered in any one project. These questions are asked via a rigorous research process which commences every new project. Specific research generates a body of knowledge which in turn becomes the theoretical engine for every project. The important point here is that for EA, the architectural project includes the discussions, lectures, research, exhibitions and explorations that work through these issues. EA are architects who believe that the practice of architecture is the production of knowledge.

In this statement, projects are but vehicles to pursue a larger set of questions. Architectural practice is understood as a research process that necessarily generates knowledge but not always buildings. EA was intensely involved in the production of non-economic value: half of EA's directors and associate directors were involved in delivering Ph.D. or master programs at established universities. One director was an adjunct professor, another one a professor and dean of an influential design school. Moreover, knowledge was collected in textual documents and other forms of representation, such as website, reports, models and their own publications (including a several hundred pages book describing the practice's first decade). Finally, exhibitions, competitions, lectures and other public events were a central part of the display of the cultural production of EA. As such, in terms of its self-understanding, EA did not see itself as a service provider. As one of the directors put it:

> We are not a service provider. We do projects that are interesting to us. We are professionals. Projects we do need to fulfil our objectives – otherwise we do not do them.

Interestingly, this perspective was shared across the office. During interviews and in many informal conversations, all organizational members emphasized their individual autonomy as opposed to being a service provider at the disposal of client's needs. As one architect put it:

> I wouldn't say that EA is a service provider … I have seen it too many times that the opinion and the professional opinion or advice has just come through and [the firm] would go out of their way to hold onto and try and – I don't know what the right word is because it's not convince or persuade or even kind of seduce, but you know, have a conversation with the client to show them that maybe that is not the best way of doing it. That is sometimes quite stubbornly pursued. (Christine)

Clients were not understood as customers that have to be satisfied. Rather the architect described her engagement with clients as 'having a conversation' (qualified by words such as *convince*, *persuade* and *seduce*). On another occasion, one architect used the example of a successful pitch to stress EA's independence:

> The pitch was what we wanted to do and it just happened to coincide with what the client wanted to do. (Adam)

The quote illustrates the strong sense of identity and autonomy that the architects claim for their work. In pitching scenarios, while clients' and EA's interests are different, the architects' professionalism resides in persuading the client that a successful collaboration, in which meaning is the most valuable currency, can occur – but only in terms of the unique artistic vision of the architect driving the encounter. Once this is tacitly agreed, pitching, sketching, discussing, building models and so on does not

represent an inferior form of value creation but becomes an elaborate form of creating aesthetic value.

The production of aesthetic value

We have seen that EA defined Architecture and its practice in terms of the production of knowledge. Knowledge was a key capital for EA. One associate director explains the focus of the practice:

> The directors have established that the practice operates to ensure that architectural ideas and narratives are the primary driver over all else. In EA all else supports this primary source and the firm has been seen to ruthlessly cut out all that gets in its way. The outcomes are, therefore, the generation and progression of ideas. (Christine, Associate Director)

It might seem surprising that an architecture firm should regard the outcome of their work as 'ideas and narratives', rather than buildings. The emphasis on knowledge generation, as core to their practice, was explained as follows:

> The directors understand that architecture can take ideas from a diverse range of sources, both of architectural and other origins. They go searching at the beginning of a project with a kind of scatter gun approach looking for things of relevance, including art works, literature, landscape, site issues and history. These are then debated and argued into a series that retain the most relevance. … The firm sees the process of architecture closer to the arts as opposed to the scientific. … There is no equation and simple calculations that can express these given relationships so as to find solutions. (Christine, Associate Director)

One can see from the quote that the firm is not claiming jurisdiction over a clearly defined area of knowledge. Rather, it argues that there is 'no equation and simple calculations' that helps in the process of designing. Echoing Vitruvius, a senior employee recounted that many fields inspire architectural practice:

> Landscape. People. Stories. History. Future. Anything really. It could be anything. A dinosaur. What was the latest one today – I don't know – icebergs, just toys really. Anything really. I guess that's the metaphor. So if you're trying to design something, name it then it becomes real. (Christine, Associate Director)

A second element in knowledge creation is the actual site on which a building is projected to be built. The firm earned its reputation by being very sensitive towards the local context, history and topography:

> It's just looking at the topography and just looking at site and landscape and getting a sense of space and also it's the place as well, and just letting that really soak in for a while and you are given a lot of time to just let that sink in and think about it, really think about the landscape and, you know, looking at aerial images and slicing them and things like that. (Karen)

In practice architects used topographic images and played with the layers, creating sophisticated images of the site, while exploring potential site-sympathetic designs in a practice resulting in unique knowledge about the site. Another employee described the process of designing as a series of translations of an original 'craziness':

> I think from my personal experience there's this combination of crazy lines that [the directors] draw, like in response to an idea which I then interpret, often in a very practical way, with what the actual requirements of the client are and so on, but try and capture in that translation a sense of the original design … It often – it can be totally unrealistic, but sometimes that element of craziness or whatever gets carried through to the final design and that's probably what they're really good at, it's not being afraid to just have a gut reaction to something and draw it and I guess what it does is it just captures their initial response without them thinking about numbers or requirements. More just the feeling that they want to capture. (Kim)

The first sketch is seen as promoting an intuitive and ingenuous creative thought that the architect describes as 'craziness'. The directors carefully draw this 'craziness' on yellow paper and hand it to one of their architects to scan so as to start tracing the contours of their ideas into more pragmatic designs. Interestingly, the interviewee uses the notion of translation to describe this movement. There is a strong idea behind this process that touches at the core of the practice of knowledge creation within EA – the idea of disclosing new worlds through the practice of drawing:

> The diagram becomes a kind of process of discovery, of delay that reveals. And here is one of the fundamental principles in the Firm's ethos: that drawing or diagramming things produces a kind of knowledge that is not attainable outside of this process of diagrammatic lines and models. In other words, that the drawing produces its own kind of knowledge. (George, Director)

Drawing produces knowledge that 'brings you somewhere else' – a knowledge that is at the heart of architectural production. EA define the field that they traversed as one where they do not compete with project managers, engineers, interior designers or other consultants. The cultural production functioned as the differentiator between EA and other practices. The knowledge generated in the drawing process was linked to the power to imagine, design and create: it provided EA with a certain authority and ability to discover relations between space, topography, history and culture. Creativity is a specific power to do something that has not otherwise been thought of previously. The essence of their power and creativity is the resolute avoidance of repetition.

The language of aesthetic value creation

Repetition requires precise knowledge, and in EA, knowledge was not precise. We encountered a strategic sense of the importance of vagueness in the creative process, as became clear when digital architecture was discussed. Digital architecture poses an important problem for an artistic strategy – if it is too precise it does not allow for ambiguity in the knowledge creation process. Through its precise lines it represents certainty and replaces the fuzziness and the ambiguity of the hand-drawn sketch. Artistry is privileged as residing in the hand, the eye and the imagination, not in the machine and its codified components. One 3D imaging expert explained:

> My specialty is the 3D image, so they [the directors] say the images look so good and we are sometimes just afraid that for clients especially that they look at that and say 'oh fantastic it's done', which it's not. So, there is a need to develop a language that still looks a bit unfinished because you don't want a client or yourself to think 'oh cool it's done', because it's never. (Emil)

Knowledge production needs a certain language that is unfinished because knowledge production is always an ongoing activity. Once the language is complete then

the imagination closes. One interviewee explained the uniqueness of EA's language:

> They [EA] do have a language. That's the thing that is quite interesting. You could have an Earth Architects' dictionary or something. For instance I was talking to one of the directors about this roof and we were discussing that it's chewing gum and so there is going to be chewing gum but to someone else that doesn't mean what it means to us. The language that they use to talk about the design, the clients, it would just mean nothing to the client. (Kylie)

EA's identity is enacted in shared language games and concepts such as 'chewing gum' for structures, etc. – a language in opposition to the precise nature of drawings. Kylie, an architect, alludes to an interesting difference between language used for clients and internal talk:

> For them [clients] we say 'We think it's a good approach to have the wall being pulled back here because then it's sort of hugging this', but like conceptually we've broken the edge away and you've pulled an existing part of the house away and you're filling the space with – I think it's almost the way you talk about it so maybe we are telling them what the idea is but not in the same way that we would talk about it amongst ourselves. (Kylie)

EA's language excluded others, such as clients, and contributes to increased cohesion and cultural differentiation. Language also became a means of exercising power and, in particular, to control clients. A key element in this was the 'Design Report', an institutionalized practice in which ideas, decisions and progress of a particular project were documented. Most 'Design Reports' were written fortnightly and included progress made to date. As one employee said, the language of the report helped EA to exercise control over the many stakeholders who were involved in projects:

> I think EA are very good at making sure they're in control. I think these design reports are fantastic for making everybody aware that your language is the language and it's the right language. Because if you're writing a design report, the consultants aren't writing that design report, the consultants generally don't see that design report. You're creating your response to the client right? So, what you're telling the client is what you want them to know. (Adam)

Through the 'Design Report' and its language, EA managed to control both the clients' perception and their expectations while also keeping other suppliers (consultants) at arm's length by strategically feeding them with information (or the lack thereof). Controlling discourse equates to controlling the emerging reality of the design; implicitly, the design's reality is a socially constructed representation that is carefully crafted by EA. By controlling language EA also controlled the field in which it collaborated with clients and other firms. One organizational member spoke about 'educating clients':

> But at the same time the way EA operates is they teach the client that story at the same time, and what happens is the language of the client starts out being very, well I'd say layman, but by the end of the project they're actually quite well schooled in how EA thinks and how to think through your architecture, and part of that is sticking to a rigorous sort of fortnightly program, so things are always pushing out and the design's always refining as it goes. (Adam)

Here, the interviewee described the architectural practice as teaching the client a certain language through an almost pedagogical fortnightly program, mainly delivered through the 'Design Report'. EA consciously educated clients to use their language; in this sense language was a social practice deeply imbued with power (Clegg 1975; Fairclough 1989).

Being in the business of creativity

In EA's practice commercial concerns had less importance than (big A) Architectural knowledge production. Design and the resulting production of aesthetic value were seen as the most important item on the agenda. Profits and general business matters were seen as secondary. As one of the directors explained in a meeting, 'We looked at our value chain and we have found that the most important thing is the architecture culture although it does not make any money' (Oban). As one architect put it during an informal conversation, 'my interest is in building models for the process of design, not showing the client the finished result' (Martin). In line with the observations above, design is seen as the end in itself, whereas clients and finished results are a mere side effect. Such a framing raises a key question: what field is EA competing in for such ambitions and motive forces to make sense?

EA positioned itself through its production of aesthetic value accumulated and legitimized within the field of architecture. Aesthetic value could be translated into economic value through willing clients looking not just for shelter but for distinction. Through positioning itself globally in the field of architecture, EA earned a license to operate in the market offering distinction. Buildings are not merely functional edifices, as Veblen's notion of conspicuous consumption described more than a century ago; they are positioning devices that mark out distinction for client and architect alike. Veblen's descriptions remained limited to the upper class and aristocracy but with the turn towards a consumer society and the aestheticization of consumption the quest for distinction has transformed into a more mundane strategy. In this context, aesthetic value becomes the resource through which they pursue their business. Consciously or not, this strategy is pursued in quite clear contradistinction to a strategy premised principally on managerialist efficiency based on an economic logic.

It is not that EA was badly managed: we do not mean that. While EA's practice revolved around the production of aesthetic value, it was still run and managed as a business. A certain schizophrenia within the firm enabled EA simultaneously to follow a strategy that denied managerialism, even as, in the backstage they practised a form of it which they did not represent in projections of their practice. Instead, their practice was projected in terms of artistic expression: competitions, books, exhibitions, etc. Nonetheless, EA paid wages and bills on a regular basis. There was a hidden side to the imagery that enabled their regular liquidity. This hidden side manifested itself in a curious side project that EA picked up in its first year. Since then, the project had expanded and a small team worked on it on a retainer basis. The project provided EA with a regular monthly income that covered basic operating costs of the business. Ironically, the job was at odds with EA's self-understanding: it consists of working with large shopping centre operators to ensure that new tenants in shopping centres would stick to the design guidelines of the shopping centre operator. New clients that moved into the shopping centres pushed for the redesign of their space to express their brands: EA was engaged by the centre owner to ensure that the redesign was in line with the overall centre design policy. The job was perceived as the antithesis of

creative design – in fact it was ensuring that other designers adhered to the standards of the shopping centre management rather than following their own creative path.

Obviously there was a tension between this job, which provided a minimum fixed income and hence certainty, and the creative ambition of EA. Nonetheless, EA held on to the job and developed it over the years. The money that the retainers brought in was seen as both a facilitator and a constraint. It was a constraint because clients had to be serviced and EA was pressed into the role of a service provider but it was also a facilitator because it allowed EA to partake in competitions and other speculative ventures that did not make any money. The mechanism that made this possible was financially black-boxing the broader organizational work of EA. All income going into EA was pooled, and then spent according to priorities, which meant constant cross-financing from one project to the other, and one office to the other. Hence, the accounting followed a simple logic of cash-flow analysis: if there was money in the bank, a book, or an exhibition, or travel to give a talk at a university it could be financed. The lack of transparency within the black box allowed for production of aesthetic value: it created a certain freedom to invest in a project as long as EA could afford it. The black-boxing also created a sense of shared identity because EA employees never quite knew who contributed to paying bills and/or the less mundane Architectural knowledge production.

Organizational members reflected on that tension in interviews. From an organizational perspective, the interviewees mentioned the 'schizophrenic' nature of the firm: moving between the polar oppositions of creative and technical work constituted their day-to-day reality. EA was also very aware of the fact that its external environment was not necessarily aware of the same 'schizophrenic' reality. As one architect put it, within the firm there was a high degree of awareness that the inputs into EA and the outputs of EA had to be clearly structured and comply with the inputs, outputs and requirements of suppliers and clients:

> It's definitely art [what we do] but you do have to assimilate that into other systems to actually produce what you are doing. You're not self-supporting unless you … we don't stand out there with the hammers and the nail guns actually building things so we have to manage turning that painting or piece of art into another system basically. It is a different system. Even if you do find a builder who is interested in the architectural ideas, you still have to work in their systems which are well and truly entrenched. You are not going to change the way you document a building. And I think that is the schizophrenic thing. I keep going back to it but you do have to be on top of that and it's part of your day-to-day practice so it's almost the interesting part. (Robert)

In this quote, the architect stressed how embedded EA was in its organizational environment. The ambiguity between clear-cut environmental demands 'you are not going to change the way you document a building' and internal complexity was experienced as schizophrenic. Potentially frustrating parts of the design process, such as the (dis)connection between design ideation and production, were seen as 'two bodies which are almost like clouds rubbing together and you sometimes get lightning' (John). In this typical quote, ambiguity and 'schizophrenia' are seen as positive and contributing to the creative process. EA managed this ambiguity because its projects were designed very flexibly. One interviewee explained:

> You know, you're heading down a design path and then some consultant input comes in. You don't sort of go around it and try and get back on your same track, you just kind of … it's almost like you're on a straight line, some info comes in, so you just suck it in

and then go … you know, then you keep … and if it kind of leads that way then that's all right. And I think that's something that I've noticed that, you know, if there's hiccups and something goes wrong it's not a, you know, the project's doomed, it's just … you just kind of absorb it. And if the building gets a lump out of the side of it then so be it, maybe that's not so bad. (Martin)

The architect made an interesting point: unforeseen changes are 'absorbed' in the project and may push projects in new, maybe even more interesting, directions. Rather than seeing a project as 'doomed' because it does not develop according to a plan, organizational members made sense of changes and often integrated them retrospectively into concepts. Instead of making decisions about designs, organizational members were making sense of the irritation that consultants and others caused, forcing them to get off their 'straight line'.

In summary, EA's production of aesthetic value created ideas, knowledge and design. The creation of knowledge and the production of aesthetic value was an integral part of most of the things they did when they did architecture. Other players were recognized as legitimate in the field, especially if they were architects and architectural critics who produce new discourse and hence enrich the knowledge-production cycle, while clients and commercial concerns were sidelined or hardly considered. From a practice-perspective, in terms of what EA employees were actually doing when they did architecture, the creation of knowledge and the production of aesthetic value was a central preoccupation of time and resources in the firm. To become a legitimate member of the field EA, needed to appear to uncompromisingly produce pieces of art and being involved in collecting whatever knowledge was necessary for a given project's aesthetics to be realized.

Discussion

Buildings not only need a physical scaffolding to get built: there is another, more invisible, scaffolding involved that enables creative architecture firms to build their own identity in their field. In this penultimate section, we will analyse this less visible scaffolding.

At the outset of this paper, we have argued that the production of aesthetic value is a more suitable analytical tool to understand creative architectural practice than the language of the profession and the notion of a dominant economic logic that supposedly colonizes it. To define what constitutes architectural practice, what can be used as resources for identity work, and what counts as legitimate action, is a struggle over power. In playing these power games, aesthetic value is the main resource. Writing about architecture, building models, drawing and other forms of creative authorship signifies a struggle to establish the authority of their knowledge production in the field. The aspiration for legitimacy among the global architectural players, and the aim to move up the hierarchy of such architectural firms, had immediate implications for the way EA was organized, structured and narrated. In a sense, it was a process of adaptation to institutional demands and pressures but the mechanism was somewhat different. Rather than adaptation to external demands and pressures, it represents adaptation to demands and pressures willingly and strategically enacted.

Building on Simmel's (2000) notion of style allows us to understand such complex adaptation and, by extension, the dynamics of practicing architecture. According to Simmel, culture has an objective and a subjective element. The objective element is the style of a particular school of painting or music. It is what artists share and what

makes them part of a larger movement. The subjective part represents the individual's expression, her unique ability and willingness to create something new. The 'something' that is recognizably new is unique and individual because we relate it to a particular creator and her *oeuvre*. For Simmel, culture comes into existence if these two spheres collide without coinciding with each other: the subject is objectified and the object is subjectified. If we only deal with subjectivity, we have expression without structures; if we only have objectification, we call it formalism without originality. It is in the clash of the objective and the subjective that Simmel sees the tragedy of culture unfolding: where the objective structure annihilates the individual, forcing conventions upon her, while the individual attempts to break free from these conventions. Only in this tragic struggle does there emerge what he finds worthy to be named culture.

The dilemma of style is visible in competitions. Objective forces are represented by the competition brief together with other aspects of the rules and requirements of the competition. The subjective forces are represented not only by the aesthetic creativity of the architects but also through their professional identity and values, which may dictate architects not to give clients what they ask for. The emergent style of architects in balancing these forces will vary from architect to architect, and from competition to competition. However, the production of aesthetic value will often entail changing the client's and the jury's understanding of the objective forces of the competition.

Simmel argues that people tend to buy into objectified forms of expression, leaving them with an empty formalism, because these forms, patterns or tropes are familiar. Style prescribes clear conventions and objective structures; at the same time, it allows the individual to satisfy a need for distinction and difference. Style allows an individual to identify with a certain group or movement and be part of an objectified culture. While it connects with others, style simultaneously allows one to differentiate oneself from others. Style elevates *and* equalizes; it creates envy and approval (Kornberger 2010). Style is a paradoxical thing: to have style one has to balance objective and subjective forces carefully, a balancing act that has an impact on architecture. EA's identity was defined through its style: style allowed EA to balance its identity between being different from other (local) firms while positioning itself within the field of (global) creative architecture.

EA, as a creative organization, has to introduce difference into their activities incessantly for, if they do not they are hardly creative. Their routine is to be non-routine, and their rule is to break rules. Creative organizations can be understood as hegemonic vehicles for producing endless diversity through difference. Producing conformity would equal system failure. The most unorthodox employees will be the most productive ones for the organization because the organization is an engine running on the exploitation of difference.

Architecture firms and other institutionalized creative practices may be seen as a form of organized heresy. Competitions represent an excellent example of this form of heresy, as forms of carnival featuring both rules and freedom (Lipstadt 2003). Competitions are the sorting mechanisms that produce orderings of esteem for cultural capital. In architecture, competitions suspend the normal order of the field: competitions re-affirm the artistic character of architecture and celebrate the creator. Competitions make surprise winners possible as they temporarily dispense with the stabilized hierarchical order of the field – as any firm might win a competition – and they are, above all, a celebration and manifestation of economic 'irrationality' – irrational of course only in the narrow sense of an economist's interpretation. A competition is a

fine example of the logic aesthetic value creation in action: in competitions, the struggle over meaning and legitimate representations is far more important than purely economic calculations. In the competition process, the firm that manages to impress the jury based on its aesthetic competence will win and hence be able to convert aesthetic value into economic capital.

EA can be regarded as a device for producing differences – without losing authority over the field. In fact, participating in writing the rules of the game and being an author (authority) in and of the field is crucial for survival. To become meaningful esthetic value relies on competent interpretations by legitimate experts (journalists, academics, etc.) that evaluate creative endeavours. Hence, EA's participation in the field (through competition, books, talks, etc. and other means of discursive production) means also *creating the conditions for the consumption of one's own work*. Shaping includes influencing other, maybe more marginal, players and bystanders, such as universities, media, local councils and the general public. Creating these conditions entails searching for differences that can be exploited heretically in terms that they can relate to the orthodoxies with which they are already familiar. Those who give, and make, sense of EA's aesthetic value production help constitute its practices. Seeing such ambiguous practices through current concerns with managerialism and professionalism in organization studies hardly captures their uniqueness.

Conclusion

The dominance of institutional theory in organization analysis has been, perhaps inadvertently, largely a triumph of implicit functionalism attended by a disinclination to recall the criticisms that functionalism's critics made in the past (Clegg 2010). One of institutional theory's problems has been the separation of social reality into the macro and the micro. To describe social interactions in terms of acts of institutionalization, as if some big external, environmental forces were working through the agency of actors in micro-situations, diminishes the creativity and ingenuity of the actors – a particular error where the organization in question thrives on this collective creativity for its reputational capital. What makes empirical analysis of organizations such as EA interesting is the fact that normal institutionalization, as it shapes the field in general, is regarded by EA as contingent and frequently met by resistance to it that is tantamount to a process of uncoupling and deinstitutionalization. Resistance to institutionalization takes place through the cultivation of a distinct style, what one might refer to (reflexively) as a distinct 'authorial voice'. Style represents a precarious order that oscillates between sameness and difference. Style describes one's ability to move through a field and develop one's own (authorial, authoritative) voice. At the same time, style connects the organization – in our case, EA – to a wider field: the production of aesthetic value has to be linked back to a wider field and consumers have to be able to relate it to other expressions within that field. In order to be able to play in the field of painting, music or film, one has to relate oneself to these or other categorizations. Style can only emerge out of the interaction with institutionalized movements and their respective author(itie)s. Simultaneously, to mimic a genre by following its rules too closely will not result in style. In Simmel's words, by simply reproducing objectified culture one cannot become part of cultural production. In the case of EA, style squared the circle: it forced EA to position itself in the global field of Architecture with a capital A; at the same time, it gave EA the license to experiment and be different. EA's identity emerged out of the interaction between their desire for

sameness and belonging to an international elite, and their ambition to develop their own language and create differences that would make a difference.

Consequently, strategies of architectural practices based on the production of aesthetic value involve the exercise of power. Aesthetic value needs to be discriminated from other, less valuable capital. The process is one of writing certain types of knowledge into a field and excluding others. Bourdieu (1991) refers to this as the power of 'symbolic violence'. No doubt: architecture is symbolically violent, creating hierarchies of style, knowledge and practice. Hierarchy is not based on 'natural' facts but is socially constructed and legitimized; hence, it needs to be defended and re-created in order to maintain any given pattern of unequal relations within a field. Symbolic power is exercised via language: language traces and frames a field, which is why architecture is essentially discursive: initially a discourse of words and images that later branch out into sign-systems of prizes, awards and, sometimes, buildings.

Our analysis suggests some (we hope) interesting new ways of studying architectural practice: we need to develop more fine-grained concepts than the notion of professional fields in which different rationalities are contested rather than suggesting an orderly switching from one regime to another, as the discourse of P2 to MPB suggests. Focus on the production of aesthetic value and its organizing practices may result in interesting vistas on organizational life. Organizational identity, conceived as style that constantly works to dissolve the sense that it has made through prior projects in a process of authorial reinvention, offers a very different basis for grasping the nature of organized cultural production. We have focused on architects in this paper but we could as easily have addressed any organized activity that requires authorship of a recognizable intellectual property – the work of consultants, designers, artists, authors, researchers – as fields of practice in which anti-isomorphism is ironically a more meaningful dominant logic than institutional theory has ever considered it to be.

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